TL 4616

ASSOCIAÇÃO DE AMIZADE
PORTUGAL-TIMOR LESTE (AAPTL)
R. Pinheiro Chagas, 77-2.º Esq.º
1000 Lisboa - Portugal
Telef. 57 47 18

(10)

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STATEMENT TO THE

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BY

TORBEN RETBØLL

LECTURER IN HISTORY

ÅRHUS KATEDRALSKOLE

DENMARK

This paper is a translation of two articles of mine about East Timor and Indonesia which have recently appeared in Børsen, a Danish newspaper published in Copenhagen. Børsen (which translates into "The Stock Exchange") represents the Danish business community and corresponds more or less to the American Wall Street Journal or Business Week.

The background is as follows: On July 22, Børsen published an interview with Indonesian vice-president Adam Malik. This was nothing but government propaganda, and I tried to respond. My original letter was returned with a note that Børsen would print it if it was shortened with about one third. They stressed that the subject was a delicate one and that I should revise the text myself. I did so and my letter was then published as an op-ed article on July 30.

On August 15, K.L. Poulsen -- a Danish business man who has spent some time in Indonesia -- responded to my article. Poulsen admitted that there had been some killings in 1965 (he gives a figure of 200-400.000 dead), but now there was economic progress, he said, and Indonesia's political future was looking bright.

I responded to this immediately. This time, my letter was long delayed but finally appeared on September 18.

This case serves as an illustration that with a little energy and enterprise it is sometimes possible to break through the wall of silence and distortion that normally surrounds the issue of Indonesia and East Timor.

PART ONE:
INDONESIA'S POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IS NOT SO BEAUTIFUL AS THE WEST SAYS: WESTERN REPORTERS ARE SUPPRESSING THE TRUTH ABOUT POLITICAL INJUSTICES

On July 22, Børsen published an interview with Indonesian vice-president Adam Malik in which he describes the political and economic situation in his country as well as its foreign policy. However, there are a number of crucial elements in Indonesia's present and past history which are ignored by both Malik and the interviewer, and therefore it is appropriate to make a comment.

Adjustment

Malik explains that the Danish East Asian Company is one of the foreign companies which "have understood how to adjust themselves to the development in Indonesia." But what kind of development is it to which the East Asian Company and others have been able to adjust themselves?

The answer is that the present military government came to power in connection with an abortive coup in 1965. In the years after that there followed an extensive massacre of "communists" and "suspected communists" which according to an official statement by admiral Sudomo in 1976 cost 450-500.000 people their lives. Sudomo hardly exaggerates.

Official figures for arrests are 750.000. Of these, only about 800 have been brought to trial where most of them have been sentenced to death.

Amnesty International estimated in 1977 that there were still between 50.000 and 100.000 political prisoners which had been imprisoned for up to 12 years with no charge or trial against them. During the last three years most of these have been released (after pressure from e.g. Amnesty International) but many of them have been placed in so-called "transit camps" which merely seem to function as new prisons.

However, all of this did not arouse much concern in Western circles that normally protest strongly over human rights violations in the socialist countries.

Thus, C.A. Sulzberger from the New York Times noted that "from an American viewpoint this represents a positive development." He refers only to the generals' coup. The associated bloodbath, already well underway, he does not even find worthy of mention (December 3, 1965).

In 1964, the American Indonesia specialist Guy Pauker had written that the anti-communist forces in Indonesia "would probably lack the ruthlessness that made it possible for the Nazis to suppress the Communist Party of Germany" in 1933, since "they are weaker than the Nazis not only in numbers and in mass support, but also in unity, discipline and leadership." But four years later he explained (with much relief) that "the assassination of the six army generals by the September 30 movement (the abortive coup -- TR) elicited the ruthlessness that I had not anticipated a year earlier and resulted in the death of a large numbers of Communist cadres."

Distortion

The most severely distorted version of these events has been produced by the well known Asian correspondent for the Los Angeles Times, George McArthur. In discussing relations between Indonesia and China he states that "the Indonesians broke relations in 1965 when the Mao-inspired Communist Party, now outlawed, attempted to seize power and subjected the country to a bloodbath." (November 15, 1978. This and the former quotes are taken from Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, The Political Economy of Human Rights, Boston: South End Press 1979, vol. one, pp. 205-217).

Here, the truth has been completely turned upside down, and the victims of the massacre have become the guilty ones. Journalism seems to have its own, quite specific rules.

Muslims

Furthermore, Malik says that the Muslims are free to put forward their political viewpoints "on a general democratic foundation."

The Indonesian democracy, however, is constructed in a special way which ensures that the government party always wins the elections. They do not win a ridiculous and quite

incredible victory of e.g. 99.9 per cent as in the socialist countries. They are satisfied to take 60 per cent, while the opposition gets the rest. This looks more democratic, and the opposition can still ~~do~~ be defeated in a vote at any time.

East Timor

Finally, Malik claims that Indonesia's foreign policy is based on a wish for "good relations with neighbours" for the benefit of "peace."

In this connection it is worth mentioning that in December 1975 Indonesia invaded its neighbour East Timor which is a former Portuguese colony. Out of a population of 650.000 in 1975, at least 100.000 have died as a result of war, hunger and disease.

In 1977, Malik ~~was~~ - at that time foreign minister -- admitted that the war had cost "50.000 or perhaps 80.000" people their lives. But, he added reassuringly, "what does that mean if compared with 600.000 people who want to join Indonesia? Then what is the big fuss? ..... It was war."

Indonesia has received a substantial military and diplomatic support for this operation from most of the Western world. The United Nations General Assembly and Security Council have repeatedly adopted resolutions which condemn the invasion and call upon Indonesia to withdraw its forces -- but with no effect.

So much for the "good relations with neighbours" and "peace."

Silence

All these facts are well documented and incontestable. It is, however, not surprising that Malik should pass them by in silence: His job is to represent his government. By contrast, it is unacceptable that a Western journalist should consider these government statements as facts and should report them with no criticism or discussion what so ever.

Journalism

I doubt that any Western reporter would be taken seriously if he were to describe the political and economic situation in a country such as the Soviet Union solely on the basis of statements from Leonid Brezhnev. And he would hardly have a whole page at his disposal in a newspaper such as Børsen (but quite ~~xxxxxxx~~ possibly in the communist Land & Folk).

However, when it comes to Indonesia, which is anti-communist and a Western ally, it appears to be a different matter.

Journalism does indeed have its own, quite specific rules.

PART TWO:
INCREDIBLE RICHES OWNED BY SMALL UPPER CLASS: CORRUPTION BLOOMING IN INDONESIA IN SPITE OF CAMPAIGN TO ELIMINATE IT

On August 15, Børsen published an article by K.L. Poulsen criticizing my article about Indonesia from July 30. Poulsen accuses me of distorting the truth about Indonesia and I would like to respond to this criticism within the limits of space available for discussion.

The coup

With regard to the abortive coup in 1965, there are several versions. The present government claims that the Communist Party was behind it and some foreign scholars does indeed share this view. It has, however, never been proven, and other scholars believe that there was an internal struggle within the military and that the party was not directly involved. (cf. the articles by W.F. Wertheim and C. Holzappel in Journal of Contemporary Asia, vol. 9, 1979).

Therefore it is not true when Poulsen ~~xx~~ says that "no one has ever denied that it was the communists who directly started the coup."

But whether the Communist Party was behind it or not, it gave the military a pretext to destroy the party, and Poulsen does not deny that an extensive massacre took place in the years after 1965.

The Economy

Poulsen states that there has been economic progress during Suharto's regime. This is true, in some respects. But Indonesia is still a country in which incredible riches are concentrated in the hands of a small upper class while the majority of the people live in poverty.

Corruption is blooming -- in spite of several governmental campaigns to eliminate it, and in spite of Adam Malik's attempt to pass it off as just "a myth" in his interview in Børsen of July 22.

Indonesia is probably the only OPEC-member whose state oil company (Pertamina) has gone bankrupt -- with a debt of ten billion dollars (this is five times the total national debt under Suharto's predecessor). However, the responsible leaders cannot be touched: They seem to have close connections to the president. In this way it will be difficult for the government to eliminate corruption.

The election system

Furthermore, Poulsen says that all the parties that ran in the 1971 elections received equal treatment.

It is true that there was more than one party. But the Communist Party, previously the third biggest in the world, was outlawed; many voters were pressed into voting for the

government party; the candidates, programs, posters and meetings of the opposition all had to be accepted by the authorities, and the opposition was not allowed to criticize the government or to speak disaparagingly about the president. The same thing happened in the 1977 elections.

In both cases, these methods helped the government secure about two thirds of the votes.

In 1978, Suharto was re-elected as president. No candidate ran against him, and the president himself appoints a large part of the body that elects him.

In addition, it should be noted that the press is constantly under censorship and that several newspapers have from time to time been closed down by the authorities. They are not allowed to re-open until they have given a solemn promise to be loyal towards the state.

This is what Suharto calls the "guided democracy." But the guiding can become so extensive that democracy disappears in the end.

The Press

Finally, with regard to the foreign press, Poulsen recommends the American magazine Newsweek which "regularly covers Indonesia, and in some cases does it critically -- but objectively."

Regularly? Critically? and objectively? Let us take an example.

In August 1975, the Australian journalist Gerald Stone arrived in East Timor during the civil war between the UDT and FRETILIN. (The civil war started when the UDT -- presumably after instructions from Indonesia -- tried to seize power by a coup). Stone attempted to verify claims that FRETILIN had committed atrocities against the population, and his main conclusion was that these claims were strongly exaggerated and to a large degree direct propaganda and falsifications.

His report was published in the London Times (September 2). Two days later, it appeared in the New York Times in a shorter version: The editors had eliminated his main conclusion and modified others (September 4). The following week it was mentioned in Newsweek which concluded that Stone thought the claims about atrocities were true (September 15).

In other words, Newsweek turned Stone's original story completely upside down.

Electronic Toys

In December 1975, Indonesia attacked East Timor with weapons from the U.S. This attack was a violation of the United Nations Charter and of American laws about arms export.

But Newsweek was silent. Up until December 1979 -- for more than four years -- there was not one word on this matter.

In response to an inquiry as to why, the editors explained in a private letter of December 1978 that the situation in Timor was "stable" and therefore did not warrant a mention: "With the responsibility of covering important developments from every corner of the ~~world~~ globe each week ..... we cannot report on a stable situation."

The week the letter was sent, Newsweek's cover story was about electronic toys!

Incidentally, Newsweek was not unique. The rest of the press more or less followed the same line. That is to say that at a time when a protest might have been contributing to halt or prevent the Indonesian massacre in Timor, the media chose to remain silent. (cf. my book East Timor, Indonesia and the Western Democracies, IWGIA: Copenhagen 1980).

Double Standards

The point is that it is not every injustice and any atrocity which can arouse the concern and compassion of the press. When, for instance, a Soviet ballet dancer wants to defect in the U.S., or when the Soviet authorities are holding a show trial against two dissidents, there seem to be no limits to the amount of space and indignation that can be used on the matter.

But when Indonesia ~~refuses~~ refuses to let a writer such as W.S. Rendra travel to Australia for a lecture tour, or when the Indonesian authorities are holding trials against their dissidents, there is hardly a word about it.

It seems that there is one standard for the Western allies and another one for our enemies.

President Suharto's government has several extensive massacres on its conscience, and it ~~is~~ is systematically violating many of the most basic democratic rights. As long as this government is in power, it is hard for me to share Poulsen's view that Indonesia's political future is looking bright.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES (this list was not in Børsen):

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